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ABSTRACT

This paper examines research conducted on Catholic school administrators. The basic questions used to identify and categorize data were: (1) Who are the researchers and from what types of universities do they come? (2) What types of Catholic school administrators are studies? (3) How are these administrators studied? and (4) What is the focus of research on these administrators? A computerized search of dissertation abstracts produced 143 items for the period 1969-88, and of those, 51 focused on Catholic school administrators. Results indicate that male researchers predominate, the majority of the research was conducted at private Catholic universities, principals were the popular subject, and the primary focus of research was administrator behavior. (SI)

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AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED RESEARCH ON THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR 1969-1987

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AN ANALYSIS OF SELECTED RESEARCH ON THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR 1969-1987

In 1982, Edwin Bridges, professor of education at Stanford University, reviewed research on school administrators for the period 1967-1980 and identified some major gaps. Among those gaps he noted that "...the impact of private school chiefs deserves considerable attention by the research community...little is known about the specific contributions that private school administrators are making to this enterprise."[1]

Because of those observations, we decided to investigate what research had been done on Catholic school administrators. One source of research information was selected for review, namely dissertation research, because "...the majority of research in educational administration is carried out by doctoral students."[2] In our review we paralleled Bridges' work to a great extent but also identified other data. The basic questions used to identify and categorize data were: (1) Who are the researchers and from what types of universities do they come? (2) What types of Catholic school administrators are studied? (3) How are these administrators studied? and (4) What is the focus of research on these administrators?

METHODOLOGY

A computerized search of Dissertation Abstracts, International was made using descriptors such as administrator, principal, headmaster, Catholic, parochial, private, which would

identify studies of Catholic school administrators. The search produced 143 items for the period 1969-1988, and of those, 51 focused on Catholic school administrators.

The following categories of information were used as a framework in reviewing each of the 51 dissertation abstracts:

1. gender of researcher;
2. types of universities in which research was done, i.e., public and private including Catholic, other denominational, and non-sectarian;
3. job title of administrator, i.e., superintendent, high school principal, elementary principal, diocesan staff;
4. research design used in the study, i.e., experiment, case study, survey;
5. method of data collection, i.e., interview, records, questionnaire, observation;
6. frame-of-reference of researcher, i.e., theoretical or problem orientation; and
7. focus of the research, i.e., the behavior of these administrators, the antecedents of their behavior, the attributable outcomes of their behavior.

CHARACTERISTICS OF INVESTIGATIONS

Using the basic questions and the seven types of information, an analysis of the abstracts resulted in the following characteristics of the investigations.

Who are the researchers and from what types of universities do they come?

Although there were 51 dissertation abstracts reviewed, there were 53 researchers because two of the dissertations each had two researchers. Thirty one (61%) of the researchers were male and 22 (39%) were female. [McCarthy, Kuh, and Beckman reported in their study of doctoral students in educational administration that the number of women doctoral students in educational administration is increasing. They noted that women represented 29% as compared to 23% in 1975 and 12% in 1973-74.][3]

It was not possible to identify the researchers by vocational status, i.e., lay, religious, clergy, because the abstracts seldom indicated titles or religious initials.

The majority (57%) of the studies were done primarily at private Catholic universities. Of the remainder, 35% were completed at public universities and 8% at private (nonsectarian or other religious affiliation).

What types of Catholic school administrators are studied?

Bridges found that nearly 75% of the researchers studied principals and superintendents.[4] This review found that 96% of the dissertations focused on principals and 2% on superintendents. Diocesan staff were the subjects of one dissertation which accounted for the remaining 2%.

Of the fifty investigations (96%) involving principals, elementary principals were studied in 49% and high school

principals in 31%. [In Bridges' review, senior high school principals edged out elementary principals.] Both elementary and high school principals were the focus in 6%. In the remaining 10% of the studies, it was not possible to discern whether the principals were elementary or secondary.

Most of the dissertations (71%) also included other subjects such as teachers, pastors, public school administrators, and school board members, but the primary focus was the Catholic school administrator.

How are these administrators studied?

In reviewing these abstracts, three types of information were sought regarding their research methodology: design, method of data collection, and frame of reference.

Regarding the design, there were three basic types and Bridges' definitions were used for identification purposes. They were:

> experiment...any investigation that entails active intervention or manipulation of some variable by the investigator and systematic measurement of the result...survey...any investigation which measures many subjects on a few characteristics at one point in time...case study...examines many characteristics of a few units over an extended period of time.[3]

This review found that 94% of the studies used the survey design; two percent used the case study; and four percent did not

specify the design. This finding paralleled Bridges' which discovered that a little more than 90% used survey research.

The next information sought was the method used by researcher for collecting data. Among the possible methods were questionnaire, interview, participant (subject) observation, and examining records or traces of the administrators and their work. We added one additional method which we labelled `multi-modal' which identified studies using more than one method, namely, questionnaire and interview.

Again the resemblance to Bridges' work was evident. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the inquiries collected data via questionnaires and if multi-modal is added, 90% of the inquiries were included. Bridges found 80% used questionnaires and when multi-modal was added the total was also 90%. In an earlier study of doctoral dissertations in educational administration, Haller also found that questionnaires were the principal data collection method and he attributed the methodological selection to time and money constraints.[4]

The frame-of-reference information was categorized in two ways, theoretical orientation and problem orientation. If the

> researcher formulated one or more directional hypotheses and offered an a priori explanation for the hypothesized relationship, the researcher was deemed to hold a theoretical orientation...If...the researcher sought to identify practical problems confronting school administrators, to uncover the various ways in which administrators

deal with these problems, and/or examine the relative effectiveness of these administrative practices in alleviating these problems, the researcher was regarded as having a problem orientation.'

This aspect of study did not provide clear cut findings. Seven (14%) of the researchers did formulate hypotheses but there was no indication as to whether they had also offered an a priori explanation. The researchers, as Bridges found, seldom studied current problems facing practicing administrators such as finance, enrollment decline, collective bargaining. Two looked at the perceptions of teachers and administrators regarding an aspect of collective bargaining and another examined the influence of a principal on ninth grade enrollment.

What is the focus of the research?

Like Bridges' study, this review also used Halpin's model for research on administrative behavior which identified the research focus as administrative behavior, antecedents or outcomes of that behavior.[8]

The antecedents of behavior were classified as person-related which dealt with attitudes and traits of the administrators or role-related which were concerned with role expectations. Eight (16%) of the investigations were person-related and nine (18%) were role-related.

The second focus was the administrator's behavior in her/his role. This was categorized under the headings of unidimensional,

multi-dimensional, and work activity which was further subdivided into work characteristics and work content. The unidimensional category was used for dissertations which examined one aspect of the administrator's behavior and multi-dimensional more than one.

Fifty-five percent of the studies investigated the administrator's behavior. The unidimensional represented 8%, multi-dimensional 25%, and work activity 21%. As Bridges also found, the majority of the multi-dimensional studies investigated the principal's leadership behavior and most often used the Leadership Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ).

The final focus included dissertations which investigated the outcomes of administrators' behavior. This category was subdivided into impact studies which tried to determine whether administrators made a difference and ratings of effectiveness studies which ascribed positive or negative consequences to an administrator's behavior or traits. This focus had the fewest studies, 6 (12%), and impact studies represented two thirds of the group.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From this investigation of 51 dissertation abstracts from 1969-1987, several conclusions may be drawn.

1. Male researchers predominate.
2. The majority of the research on Catholic school administrators was conducted at private Catholic universities.
3. Principals, particularly elementary principals, were the

popular subjects of dissertation researchers.

4. Survey was the preferred research design.
5. Questionnaires led the data collection methods.
6. The primary focus of research is administrator behavior, particularly leadership behavior.

In light of this review, the following recommendations are made.

1. Additional research would be helpful in regard to Catholic school superintendents and diocesan office staff members.
2. The case study design may be considered useful for examining specific roles in greater depth. [This method is often more time consuming but may yield some valuable information about specific roles.
3. Current problems facing administrators - aspects of finance, enrollment decline, Catholicity of the school, and collective bargaining - require study in a variety of approaches to discern how administrators are addressing them and the effectiveness of their approaches to meeting these problems.
4. The selection of administrators and the preparation for administrative roles also require attention. [Only one researcher studied factors which led teachers to consider Catholic school administration.]

Finally, it was encouraging to note that of the 143 items identified in the computer search regarding research on Catholic

education, more than a third examined Catholic school administrators. More research might usefully be devoted to these subjects and, upon completion, also be prepared for broader publication as journal articles.

1. Edwin M. Bridges, "Research on the School Administrator: The State of the Art, 1967-1980," Educational Administration Quarterly, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Summer, 1982), pp. 12-33.

2. Ibid., p. 13.

3. Martha M. McCarthy, George D. Kuh, and Joan M. Beckman, "Characteristics and Attitudes of Doctoral Students in Educational Administration," Phi Delta Kappan, (November, 1979), p. 202.

4. Bridges, p. 14.

5. Bridges, p. 15.

6. Emil J. Haller, "Questionnaires and the Dissertation in Educational Administration," Educational Administration Quarterly, Vol. 15, No. 1 (Winter, 1979), pp. 47-66.